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## The continuing relevance of Paulo Freire

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# **The Continuing Relevance of Paulo Freire: celebrating 50 years since the publication of Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

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## **Abstract**

This article celebrates 50 years since the publication of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. His key ideas are explored and their continuing relevance for both understanding and resisting the increasingly neoconservative political landscape in Brazil analysed.

## **Keywords**

Paulo Freire; critical pedagogy; social movements; social transformation; international social work

## **Word Count**

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# The Continuing Relevance of Paulo Freire: celebrating 50 years since the publication of Pedagogy of the Oppressed

## Introduction

Paulo Freire is most commonly associated with his powerful critique of the 'banking' approach to education and theoretical work on critical literacy; for Freire, the unidirectional flow of information from teacher to student emblemises the societal structures that systematically oppress particular groups and marginalise their lived experiences and knowledges. The depth of his theoretical explorations of critical pedagogy mean that his work has been influential far beyond both the field of education and his native Brazil. His work combines honest reflexive writing with a powerful theoretically driven understanding of society to provide a collection of work that demands that the reader re-visit, re-contextualise and re-vision their experiences; it is a work that provides a form of theoretical gestation period, it encases the reader in a safe place to grow and develop but recognises that birth is inherently unique – Freire's work demands that each of us prepare ourselves for the labour and birth of a re-visioned society. It is in his clarity on the impossibility of simple transplantation of theory from one context to another that allows for Freire's work to enter into an ongoing dialogue with his readers, resulting in his work maintaining both historical and geographical relevance. To celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Paulo Freire's most well-known work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, this article will explore the ways in which his work is still inspiring and guiding practitioners, activists and communities to continue to be subjects rather than merely objects of history (Freire, 1985: 199).

## Paulo Freire: two simple ideas, one revolutionary intellectual

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was an educator from the north-east of Brazil whose experience of teaching literacy to rural illiterate land workers laid the foundation for the central tenet to his theoretical work: that education can never be politically neutral. For Freire it is impossible to think about education without thinking about power; to regard the educational process as merely technique fails to recognise the politically situated role of education, and, as a consequence, of the educator:

*'To keep our options secret, to conceal them in cobwebs of technique or disguise them by claiming neutrality does not constitute neutrality; quite the contrary, it helps maintain the status quo.'* (Freire, 1985: 39)

Freire's works derive from two seemingly simple ideas, yet these ideas lead us into a complex theoretical exploration of how society is structured and maintained. First, for Freire education is inherently a political act. Education has, by its nature 'the inherent qualities to be political, as indeed politics has educational aspects. In other words, an educational act has a political nature and a political act has an educational nature' (Freire, 1985: 188). Freire's work on adult literacy clearly illustrates his rationale for viewing education as inherently political and as central to political struggles for freedom. As highlighted by Giroux: 'To be literate is *not* to be free, it is to be present and active in the struggle for reclaiming one's voice, history and future' (Giroux, 1987: 11). In other words, literacy creates the *potential* for freedom rather than freedom itself. Freire differentiates between literacy – the technical ability to decode letters and words – and *functional literacy*. To be functionally literate is the ability to decode messages of media culture and counter official interpretations of social economic and political reality (Giroux, 1987: 12); in

short, it is the ability to read reality, the ability for each individual to place their experiences in historical and political context and through this they are able to understand their relationship with the world. For Freire, 'reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world' (Freire and Macedo, 1987: 35). Freire's understanding of the act of becoming literate moves far beyond a responsibility on the part of the educator to merely find material that is of interest to the student, it requires them to cross the street and walk alongside the student in their process of questioning, of reviewing and re-contextualising their experiences. It requires the educator to recognise that both educator and student are in the process of learning; both are incomplete beings in the constant process of humanisation, they are both 'beings in the process of becoming – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality' (Freire, 1996: 65). Both are subjects of history and this recognition not only frees the student to reconstitute their relationship with the world, it frees the educator to do the same as we 'exercise our capacity to learn and to teach so much better for being subjects and not simply objects of the process we are engaged in' (Freire, 2001: 58).

It is therefore from the deceptively simple premise of education as a political act that Freire develops a complex theoretical critique that is clearly grounded in his practice as an adult educator. This leads us to his second basic idea: that education is a series of theories put into practice (Freire, 1985: 188). Independent of specialism or role, anyone involved in educational practice is also involved in the practice of knowing. Whether this be learning a predetermined, existing knowledge or creating new knowledge, 'all educational practices involve the act of knowing, throughout the world' (Freire, 1985: 189). This therefore means that all educational practices involve epistemological questions of how the educator views knowledge – is knowledge something to be simply passed to students as passive recipients? Or are students subjects of their own histories and therefore the role of the educator is to inspire them to discover their own knowledges? While Freire's position is clearly the latter, that we are all subjects of history in constant (re)discovery of knowledge, this epistemological question of what is knowledge, who may or may not 'hold' it, how it evolves and develops, is central to all educational practice. What is interesting therefore is that this question requires reflection independent of political perspective.

### **Social transformation and cultural revolution: objectivity, subjectivity and critical consciousness**

The interlacing of theory and practice developed out of Freire's educational practice and his theoretical work. For Freire, theory and practice work in dialogue with one another through praxis, an iterative process that brings subjectivity and objectivity into a mutual conversation. As explained by Giroux: 'Theory does not dictate practice; rather, it serves to hold practice at arm's length in order to mediate and critically comprehend the type of praxis needed within a specific setting at a particular time in history' (Giroux, 1985: xxiii). Theory and practice are in constant tension: theory provides the distance required to create the necessary tautness on reality that allows for objectivity, while practice provides the foundations to which we can attach the theoretical line and analyse it critically through our own subjective experience. It is this push-pull of distance and context – or objectivity and subjectivity – in which praxis is formed. It is the depth of Freire's work on praxis that in turn provides the context through which we can begin to understand probably his most well-known work on conscientisation, or critical consciousness.

Freire's thinking on critical consciousness is rooted in his reading of Gramsci's work on hegemony, counterhegemony and social consciousness (Gramsci, 1971). For Freire, it is the ability to distance ourselves from reality through praxis that creates the possibility for (re)viewing that reality in relation to our lived experiences. So the ability to objectively (re)view our subjective experience creates the means

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4 by which we can reveal the hegemonic forces influencing everyday experience. It enables us to reassess  
5 our relationship with the world and enter into a process of politicising our everyday experiences, of  
6 countering the beliefs and assumptions that condition human experience:  
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9 *'I call this critical because in many cases individuals have not yet perceived themselves as*  
10 *conditioned; on the contrary, they passively speak of their freedom' (Freire and Macedo,*  
11 *1987: 48).*  
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13 As noted earlier, it is critical literacy – the ability to decode popular messages as a result of functional  
14 literacy – that enables individuals to begin to reclaim their voice and enter into a process of  
15 transformation. For Freire, it is the ability to see your *unfreedom* that opens the path towards liberation.  
16 This highlights the role of the educator in this process. It is the role of the critical educator to introduce  
17 the theoretical framing that enables the student to create the objective distance from their subjective  
18 experience to begin to enter into their own process of praxis – of understanding how the theory speaks  
19 to their own lived experiences. It is at this point that Freire developed a distinct interpretation of the  
20 historical materialism of Orthodox Marxist thought as a 'liberating fatalism', which he argued relegates  
21 humans to being merely fatalistic objects of history (Freire, 1985: 179), whereas for Freire social  
22 transformation – and therefore liberation of people – requires us all to be active subjects in the making  
23 of history; in other words, it requires us all to be critically conscious of our relationship with the world,  
24 with knowledge and the forces of oppression. It is only through this critical awareness that the necessary  
25 conditions for cultural revolution can be formed.  
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30 Cultural revolution, which Freire viewed as the basis for social transformation, demands that we move  
31 beyond diametrically opposing the forces of domination – the power elites who through economic,  
32 political and military dominance create the conditions for silencing the popular masses – and discover  
33 new ways of developing and valuing knowledge. Freire distinguishes between cultural action for freedom,  
34 which he views as being the precursor to cultural revolution, and cultural action for domination, which he  
35 views as simply repeating the same patterns of domination, albeit with a socialist face. The fundamental  
36 difference between cultural action for freedom and cultural action for domination is the reinvention of  
37 power; it is the development of new forms of knowledge, social relations and political structures. But in  
38 order for that to happen, the popular masses must free themselves from their submersion in the reality  
39 of their oppression, as it is this submersion that means instead of identifying with liberation, they identify  
40 with its opposite pole (Freire, 1996: 27). In other words, the very experience of oppression means that  
41 the oppressed can only see one form of power; the power that comes through domination. As Fanon  
42 (1986: 228) notes: 'For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white.' The challenge for cultural  
43 revolution therefore is to build cultural action that develops new forms of power:  
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49 *'For me, historical transformation... is more important than taking power. We ought not*  
50 *to be concerned with the mere shifting of power from one group to another. It is necessary*  
51 *to understand that in seizing power one must transform it.'* (Freire and Macedo, 1987: 55)  
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54 The transformation of power requires the transformation of the production of knowledge, and this in turn  
55 requires the transformation of social relations. Freire views power as dialectic, as working both on and  
56 through people (Giroux, 1985: xix). Domination is imposed through state institutions and 'the way in which  
57 power, technology, and ideology come together to produce forms of knowledge, social relations, and  
58 other concrete cultural forms that function to actively silence people. But the subtlety of domination is  
59 not exhausted by simply referring to those cultural forms that bear down on the oppressed daily; it is also  
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to be found in the way in which the oppressed internalize and thus participate in their own oppression' (Giroux, 1985: xix). This internalised oppression creates obstacles to self-knowledge as the submersion in the dynamics of oppression distort people's experiences of reality and produces a particular version of 'truth' (Giroux, 1988: xxxv). This highlights the central role of praxis in Freire's work as it is only through the objective distance created through the dialogical relationship between theory and practice that liberates space for a critical reframing of people's subjective experiences of the 'culture of silence' created through cultural domination.

The internalisation of oppression presents a challenge for social transformation. While Freire's work highlights the need to look beyond cultural representations as depicted by the power elites and recognise, value and provide space for the cultures of dominated groups, the nature of internalised oppression means that while valuing the cultural capital of the oppressed, we need to interrogate it for ways in which it bears the logic of domination (Giroux, 1985: xxii). His work raises the question: how can we overcome oppression when our subjective experiences, our own distorted truths, are framed within the same oppressive social relations that we are trying to overcome?

### **The role of social movements in reinventing power: spaces for epistemological innovation**

Freire developed his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, while working with illiterate land workers in the rural regions of north-east Brazil in the early 1960s. This was a complex political period in which two seemingly contradictory forces, socialism and developmentalism, were at play within the political landscape. The late 1950s and early 1960s saw a radicalised peasant movement emerge in the North-East of Brazil at the same time as the development of government popular education programmes, but rather than being aligned with the peasant movement's struggles the programmes were organised by a government hostile to the radicalised peasant movement. As Leher and Vittoria (2015: 146) highlight, at this time the strategy of the political left in Brazil was 'Bourgeois Democracy':

*'...socialism presupposed a bourgeois-democratic step in which workers should engage with national-developmental sectors, aiming to strengthen capitalist industrialization and modernization as precondition for the transition to socialism. The underlying thesis was that the country still had pre-capitalist, feudal and semi-feudal regions that hindered the training of an advanced proletariat. One way to suppress the pre-capitalist traces would be to transform the peasants into wage-labourers.'*

Freire was developing his educational programmes within this political landscape, and this provides a foundational clarity for understanding his pedagogical approach to literacy. Rather than popular education being used as a tool by which the leaders of a socialist movement could transform a passive proletariat, which Freire viewed as merely transferring power from one set of dominant forces to another, his work highlights that the role of popular education should be to *reinvent* power. For Freire, to reinvent power it is first necessary to reveal the relations of power that have influenced subjective experience, and this can only be achieved once we see ourselves as subjects of a set of social relations that are not neutral, natural or passive but actively moulded to conform with the interests of the dominant social forces. The role of critical pedagogy therefore is to shift a passive proletariat into a process of active self-transformation in which power is revealed, subjectivity reinvented and history actively created by the popular masses.

The political landscape in this period of Brazilian history also reveals the role of social movements in the process of reinventing power. Freire viewed social movements as inherently political, as spaces which bring a range of people together with the explicit purpose of challenging dominant forces of power. They therefore provide a rich ground on which to reinvent relations of power. Contrary to critics of social movements who argued that the focus on individuals within classes rather than with class conflict itself weakened the socialist cause, Freire instead viewed social movements as providing a space for dialogue and connection and therefore spaces for creating new knowledges, new cultures and a new political language (Freire, 1985: 194). They therefore provide spaces to develop new epistemologies that directly challenge the 'epistemic squint' of the dominant powers that view knowledges emerging from dominated groups as scientifically and epistemologically inferior (Romão, 2014: 47). Many social movements across Brazil continue to be heavily influenced by Freire's theories of popular education. His work provides a foundation that guides how movements engage with dominated populations and how to resist the structural challenges that come through domination. Through working with indigenous knowledges as Freire advocated, the movements bring the possibility of a critical reading of reality that in turn provides the ability to build new social relations that provide a counterpoint to the hegemonic relations of power. It is through facilitating this critical knowledge that the contradictions of the capitalist system are revealed and the working classes are then able to construct new forms of knowledge that actively resist oppression.

One of the largest social movements in Latin America is the Landless Workers' Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras Rurais Sem Terra – MST*). Formed by rural workers and founded as a national movement in 1984, during the period of the military dictatorship, the central tenet to MST's work is the question of education and training for rural workers and their families. As a direct result of the movements' diverse range of experiences working with education across the whole of Brazil – from the occupation of unproductive land and land targeted by speculators, to their work in hard-won settlements, small-scale family agriculture and agroecology – the movement has developed an approach to education and training that is explicitly focused on resistance and emancipation from the oppression. Initially the inclusion of education within the movement was a result of the lack of formal schooling in the rural settlements and occupying camps, resulting in the movement needing to provide some form of education and schooling. This inevitably led to a critique of the ideology of mainstream education in relation to the experiences of rural workers (Leher and Vittoria, 2015). This meant that from the outset the movement was re-visioning the role of education in relation to the members' subjective experiences. According to Caldart (2003), MST has a clear pedagogy or, more accurately, a clear praxis to how they approach education. This is a pedagogy that is based on one very clear principle: that to educate is to humanise. Caldart (2003), an intellectual of the MST movement, argues that the movement itself has become a pedagogy; it is through the subjective experiences of the workers and their fight for access to land that is the basis for their education. In other words, education within the movement is embedded in the members' experiences as landless workers and it is through re-viewing their connection with the land and re-viewing history through their own experiences that they develop the functional literacy that enables a re-reading of the world. It is a clear process of praxis: subjective experience and theoretical knowledge in a constant dialogue, resulting in new and constantly evolving knowledges. This work, over the past 34 years, includes the creation of the Florestan Fernandes National School (*Escola Nacional Florestan Fernandes – ENFF*) which was built in 2004 by members of the MST movement as a training centre for workers and activists. The centre has a diverse range of formal and informal courses, including literacy, collective democracy, community health, agriculture and agroecology, all of which are founded on critical pedagogy and a critical reading of the world. Having provided education for over six thousand students,

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4 it is a powerful example of the constantly evolving knowledges that can emerge from dominated groups  
5 and the way in which this can challenge the legitimised and hegemonic knowledge of dominant cultures.  
6 And as Romão argues, this 'epistemic diversity' is essential for overcoming the power relations that have  
7 shaped our modern world:  
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10 *'...contemporary colonization [is] a kind of scientific and epistemological domination. So,*  
11 *decolonization today would no longer be a process of liberation from the colonies to create*  
12 *independent nation-state, but, rather a process of recognition of various sciences and*  
13 *epistemologies.'* (2014: 53)  
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### 15 **Freire's continued relevance: the challenge of the neoconservative agenda**

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17 Freire's work on critical education is more important than ever. The next section of the paper will illustrate  
18 this ongoing relevance by describing how the national system for social work which developed in Brazil  
19 under the government of President Lula de Silva in the early 2000s is being undermined by the rightward  
20 direction of national social policy amid the recent political turbulence. This attempt to marginalise the  
21 voices of sections of the working classes highlights the continued need for a Freirean Pedagogy of  
22 Resistance which will be discussed in the following section.  
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26 Brazil is experiencing a political and economic crisis that has shaken the country's 30-year democratic  
27 foundations to their core (Cowan, 2016). The turbulent political landscape of the 1960s and 1970s has  
28 returned, including the impeachment and removal of President Dilma Rousseff, Brazil's democratically  
29 elected president, in what she declared a 'parliamentary coup d'état' (Green, 2016). The impeachment  
30 occurred against a background of political scandal, popular protest and economic decline that has created  
31 an opaque political context in which the current government, widely viewed as illegitimate by national  
32 and international figures, has begun a systematic deconstruction of the social and democratic rights that  
33 have been fought for by the working classes over the past 40 years. A freeze on budgets across all social  
34 sectors for the next 20 years means that the social and political rights of the Brazilian population are now  
35 deeply uncertain. For the social work sector, the funding cuts threaten the structure of the national social  
36 support system, itself only still in its infancy, and its basic principles of universality and equality are being  
37 systematically undermined. In order to fully understand the impact of the new political terrain, it is first  
38 necessary to provide a brief overview of the evolution of social rights in recent Brazilian history.  
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44 In her comprehensive overview of the historical development of social assistance in Brazil, Gutierrez  
45 (2017) notes that it was only after the 1988 Constitution and the introduction of a national social security  
46 system that social policies gained the status of *social rights*. Up until this point, poverty was not seen as a  
47 consequence of structural inequalities in Brazilian society and therefore addressing the needs of the poor  
48 had been a class-based philanthropic endeavour characterised by charity. The 1988 Constitution is  
49 therefore a key point in the development of social work in Brazil, initiating a process of public debate that  
50 led to the incorporation of social work into national legal frameworks through the Lei Orgânica de  
51 Assistência Social (LOAS - Lei 8742/93) in 1993. For the first time, social security was defined as a  
52 responsibility of the State and therefore a right for all citizens, irrespective of previous financial or social  
53 contributions (Silveira, 2017). The shift away from philanthropy and charity and towards a system of state  
54 social work founded on the basic principles of universality and equality was a significant change in political  
55 direction. Poverty was now recognised as a social issue with structural causes that lay beyond the  
56 individual. The notion of 'assistencialismo', broadly defined as 'helping', was recognised as reinforcing  
57 structural inequalities that, through placing the poor as people in need, dehumanised their experiences  
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and failed to recognise the multifaceted and complex nature of vulnerability (Silva and de Godoi Ferreira de Almeida, 2018). This is a significant philosophical shift in thinking, yet the decade after the 1988 Constitution remained characterised by assistentialist, singular, fragmented, overlapping actions with weak regulation, partly due to the adverse economic context and ongoing structural economic adjustment (Gutierrez 2017). The challenging economic and social context during this period, combined with the need to overcome the dominance of ‘assistentialist’ approaches to working with groups experiencing poverty, created a rich environment for debate and dialogue as academics, social workers and grassroots activists worked together to define social work and influence policy direction. This national debate, led principally by social workers, meant that when the Socialist Workers’ Party, led by President Lula de Silva, came into power in 2002 the sector was in a prime position to directly influence policy direction in the new administration. In 2005 the Unified Social Support System (Sistema Único de Assistência Social – SUAS) was introduced, creating a national system for social work founded on two basic principles: that social work is a right for all citizens that is guaranteed by the State, and that social work should be regulated through unified federal policies at a national level (Gutierrez, 2017). The creation of SUAS marked the start of a series of legislative changes throughout the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century that broke away from the assistentialist tradition and redefined social work throughout Brazil as a collaborative endeavour working alongside the population to challenge structural injustice.

Social work in Brazil is still young and fragile and, a little more than one decade after SUAS was introduced, the unified social work system is now facing an uncertain future. On 17<sup>th</sup> April 2016, amid huge national and global controversy, President Dilma Rousseff was impeached in a televised session of the National Congress. Across the nation, Brazilians watched as their representatives declared their votes into a microphone in the centre of a packed House. But what the declarations revealed was less about the legalities of President Rousseff’s actions in office but rather the illegalities of ‘recalling the presidential mandate in order to implement a new economic and social order’ (Avritzer, 2017). The impeachment of President Dilma has been widely criticised as being an engineered political project created by the political and economic elite to protect their own interests (Avritzer, 2017; van Dijk, 2017; Taub, 2016; Shahshahni, 2016) and the new government viewed as illegitimate by national and international figures (Mancebo, 2017). As a result of Rousseff’s impeachment, the interim presidency was handed to Vice-President Michel Temer, a member of the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (*Partido Movimento Democrático Brasileiro – PMDB*). The challenge that this new administration posed to progressive social work soon became clear. The day after Rousseff’s impeachment, President Temer appointed a Cabinet composed almost entirely of white men (Watts, 2016) and issued an order cancelling most of the Secretaries linked to rights and social protection, including the Ministry for Human Rights, the Ministry for Agrarian Reform, the Secretary for Women’s Rights, the Secretary for Racial Equality and the Ministry of Culture (Avritzer, 2017). The scaling back of hard-won social protections continues, despite mounting evidence that President Temer has himself been involved in corruption (Benites, 2017; Darlington, 2017; Matais and Fabrini, 2017; Phillips, 2017). This dramatic shift to the right within formal political institutions has been characterised by a vision of a minimal state, funding cuts, economic austerity, state deregulation and mass discontinuation of projects that promote social inclusion (Malta et al, 2018). The resurgence of a neo-liberal, Conservative ideology has created an environment in which the basic principles encapsulated in the 1988 Constitution have been undermined, creating an uncertain and risky political landscape for Brazilian social work (Castilho, de Souza Lemos and Batista Gomes, 2017). The impact of the dramatic shift to the political right by the new administration is that the hard-won core principles underpinning progressive social work in Brazil – universality and equality – are being replaced by policies that return to

the assistentialist, class-based programmes of the past. This is no more clearly demonstrated than through *Programa Criança Feliz* (the Happy Child Programme), introduced by the new federal government in 2016.

*Programa Criança Feliz* is a national social support programme incorporating regular home visits to families in receipt of the 'Bolsa Família' welfare benefit. Bolsa Família is a conditional cash transfer social welfare programme. Introduced in 2003 under the government of President Lula de Silva, the programme is designed to specifically target the reduction of child labour, through requiring children to be vaccinated and enrolled in school, and the enhancement of women's financial capital, through directing payments to the female heads of households. The World Bank has referred to the programme as Brazil's 'quiet revolution' (Wetzel and Econômico, 2013), serving 13.8 million families or one quarter of the country's population in 2013, of which the vast majority were women, black or mixed race and/or under the age of 17 (Campello and Neri, 2014). Studies consistently demonstrate that Bolsa Família has successfully reduced national income inequality and by 2013 it had lifted 22 million people out of extreme poverty (Campello and Neri, 2014). By targeting families in receipt of Bolsa Família, *Programa Criança Feliz* undermines the key principle of cash transfer programmes: that poverty is a consequence of structural inequalities rather than individual or familial characteristics. In contrast to Bolsa Família, the aim of *Programa Criança Feliz* is to 'provide guidance and orientations to strengthen the familial and community connections and stimulate child development' (Ministério de Desenvolvimento Social, 2017), returning once again to the assistentialist principles based on individualist, class-based assumptions on the causes of poverty. The fact that the programme will be coordinated by the Marcela Temer, the wife of President Michel Temer, further deepens concerns about a return to the 'primeiro-damismo' of the past, whereby the wives of government officials would take responsibility for social programmes (Gutierrez, 2017). The absence of clear objectives and complete absence of any requirement for professional qualifications for coordinators or practitioners means the programme risks being framed through the traditional class-based, patriarchal conservative notions of societal and family structures that characterise the current administration (Silveira, 2017). Critics of the *Programa Criança Feliz* highlight that it has created 'profound uncertainty with regards to the guaranteeing of child, family and women's rights' (Sposati, 2017, p. 527) with the fear that the programme will become 'a tool for the criminalisation of poverty... women's subordination and, worse still, weakening of the rights for integrated protection for children and young people' (Sposati, 2017: 530). Others have argued that this is the first step towards the wholesale dismantling of the unified health service (SUAS) (Castilho, de Souza Lemos and Batista Gomes, 2017).

### **The new politics of education and the need for a *Pedagogy of Resistance***

Alongside the emergence of an invigorated voice from the right within social policy, the political shift rightwards has also included opening the economy to further foreign investment, the privatization of state-owned companies and the expansion of oil exploration by multinational corporations (Green, 2016). This sequence of events – President Rousseff's impeachment, which some have argued constitutes a *coup d'état*, followed by the resurgence of the neoconservative agenda within government policy – is surprisingly accurately reflected in Freire's work, over 30 years ago:

*'In Brazil, the transition marked by the coup d'état sets up recapitulation to an ideology of development based on the handing over of the national economy to foreign interests, an ideology in which 'the idea of the great international enterprise replaces the idea of the state monopoly as the basis for development.'* One of the basic requirements for such an

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4 *ideology is necessarily silencing of the popular sectors and their consequent removal from*  
5 *the sphere of decision making.’ (Freire, 1985: 80)*  
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8 This provides an important reflection on the introduction of cross-cutting programmes such as the  
9 *Programa Criança Feliz*. By investing in a programme that claims to bring together health services,  
10 education, social services, environment, culture, leisure and rights (Ministério de Desenvolvimento Social,  
11 2017) at a time of cuts in funding for existing health and social care systems, the risk is that the programme  
12 is a means by which to silence dissident voices. Through undermining current health and social care  
13 systems, alternative perspectives are removed from key decision making spheres, enabling the neo-liberal  
14 narrative advocating marketization to dominate debates (Castilho, de Souza Lemos and Batista Gomes,  
15 2017). The task facing social work is therefore how to reconstitute and strengthen interdisciplinary  
16 relationships within this increasingly neoconservative landscape. Freire’s work provides a valuable  
17 framework for countering the dominant political narrative and building the solidarity necessary to develop  
18 a new language to counter the logic of domination. His work reminds us that it is not sufficient to simply  
19 oppose the forces of domination; we need instead to find new ways of developing and valuing knowledge  
20 that facilitates a *reinvention* of power. As noted previously, the difference between cultural action for  
21 freedom and cultural action for domination is the development of new forms of knowledge, social  
22 relations and political structures. Brazil is therefore at a point in history where there is a need to gather  
23 together, to build alliances across social and professional boundaries and develop a new, unified  
24 counterhegemonic voice; in other words, there is now, more than ever, a need to identify a *Pedagogy of*  
25 *Resistance* (Freire and Macedo, 1987). There is once again a need to build a national dialogue between  
26 social workers, grassroots activists and academics to form a class based resistance against the current  
27 forms of exploitation and oppression advocated within the current administration (Castilho, de Souza  
28 Lemos and Batista Gomes, 2017). The challenge for Brazilian social work was clearly articulated by the  
29 Federal Council for Social Work (Conselho Federal de Serviço Social – CFESS) in their annual newsletter  
30 released to celebrate the national day for social work in 2017:  
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38 *‘In a class-based fight, there is no draw – Social worker: professional in defence of democratic*  
39 *freedoms and social rights.’ (Conselho Federal de Serviço Social, 2017: 5 [translation by*  
40 *authors])*  
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42 The theme highlighted by the National Council that ‘there is no draw!’ (‘Não há empate!’) provides a clear  
43 political position for social work: in a society structured by class, neutrality will only ever be a means by  
44 which to pacify the working classes. As noted by Silveiro Júnior (2018) in his comprehensive analysis of  
45 the impact of the current economic crisis on Brazilian social work, this creates two clear priorities. First,  
46 there is a need for comprehensive theoretical-political analysis of the emerging social phenomena that  
47 contributes to the class struggle. Second, at the level of intervention it is essential to refuse approaches  
48 that adopt individualised, moral positions and instead to incentivise and support initiatives that promote  
49 mobilisation and self-organisation (Silveiro Júnior, 2018). The role of social work is therefore to open up  
50 spaces for politicisation; spaces in which the working classes can understand their relationship with this  
51 new socio-political landscape. In other words, the role of social work is to work across academic, practice  
52 and class boundaries to develop the ‘epistemic diversity’ (Romão, 2014) necessary to build a pedagogy of  
53 resistance that enables a re-reading of the world and a re-visioning of the future.  
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## 58 **Concluding thoughts**

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4 In the context of this socio-political crisis in Brazil, Freire's work provides more than just a theoretical  
5 framework for navigating a path through this complex socio-political terrain. It also provides a form of  
6 emotional sustenance, a therapeutic reassurance that even any sense of hopelessness that we may feel  
7 while looking towards an uncertain future can be understood as a part of the dialogical process of  
8 resistance:  
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11 *'Hope is an ontological need. Hopelessness is but hope that has lost its bearings, and become*  
12 *a distortion of that ontological need... I am hopeful, not out of mere stubbornness, but out of*  
13 *an existential, concrete imperative.'* (Freire, 2014)  
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16 At a time when it would be easy to fall into despair, Freire reframes and validates our anger and  
17 frustration, turning it instead into the foundation upon which to build a re-visioned society. His final book,  
18 Pedagogy of Hope, was 'written in rage and love – without which there is no hope' (Freire, 2014: 4),  
19 simultaneously legitimising raw emotion while recognising that this is the basis for hopeful collective  
20 action.  
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23 At a time in which the economic crisis and narrative of fear within mainstream media has created an  
24 ideological discourse that is tainted with prejudice, Freire reminds us that the task of the critical educator  
25 is to 'unveil opportunities for hope' (Freire, 2014: 3). In order to defend the social and political rights of  
26 the Brazilian population, and to defend the principles contained within the national social support system  
27 – as well as to protect its continued existence – social workers, activists and academics need to provide a  
28 hopeful counter-narrative that asks people to look beyond subjective differences between different  
29 groups of the population and towards the relations of oppression that maintain inequality. The work of  
30 Paulo Freire provides a language to enable a re-reading of reality that challenges hegemonic discourses  
31 and establishes new relations of power while demanding that we reinterpret his thinking within the new  
32 socio-political context. It is through this process of re-visiting, re-contextualising and re-visioning  
33 individual and collective experiences that a Pedagogy of Resistance can emerge.  
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## 40 **Conflict of Interest**

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42 The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.  
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